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‘1968’ – a Catalyst of Consumer Society¹

Alexander Sedlmaier and Stephan Malinowski

Abstract:

The emergence of a new type of consumer society was catalysed rather than impeded by the tumultuous events of the late 1960s. The rebels of 1968 contributed considerably to the breaking down of conservative obstacles to consumption, to the opening up of new markets, and to the creation of a new type of consumer. At its heart, ‘1968’ was an intra-bourgeois confrontation pursued by an innovative minority. The many instances of personal transformation from protagonists of protest to pillars of the establishment can be interpreted in the context of communicative and consumerist modernisation. The protesters’ performative hedonism proved highly compatible with consumer culture. Protest culture, on the one hand, sought the publicity of consumer society as a spatial and moral sphere for its activities. The response of the ‘system’ to the protests, on the other hand, was surprisingly flexible, and resulted in the further development of capitalism and consumer society in the late 20th century.

In 1848, a text which was to make a name for itself announced a revolution:

All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind. The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the entire surface of the globe.²

Here Marx and Engels describe a process of socio-cultural transformation which has continued uninterrupted to the present day: the revolutionisation of social relationships by a capitalist market logic and commercialisation from which no area of life is spared.

This concept of revolution has so far hardly been used to interpret the protest culture of the late 1960s. Both the literature produced by the movement’s renegades and conservative analyses have highlighted its revolutionary intentions and anti-capitalist thrust. The waves of research that have emerged in the past decade have begun to revise this view significantly. However, an important aspect has not been at the cutting edge of research: that hindrances to consumption in the form of traditional allegiances to authorities were discarded like reac-

¹ For a more extended discussion, see our earlier: “‘1968’ als Katalysator der Konsumgesellschaft. Performative Regelverstöße, kommerzielle Adaptionen und ihre gegenseitige Durchdringung”, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 32,2 (2006), pp. 238–267.

² Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848), English translation of 1888, London 1991, p. 28.

tionary rubbish in the ‘age of affluence’ of the 1960s, whose basic logic lay not so much in the satisfaction but in the awakening of needs.

Two pictures, 35 years apart, help to make a parenthesis which will illustrate this process. The first picture is from 1968. It represents a balancing act between lifestyle revolt and the cult of celebrity: In April 1968, Rudi Dutschke was visited by a crew from the business magazine *Capital* including the advertising photographer Charles Wilp – a pupil of the Jesuits and Man Ray and a rising star of a commercial aesthetic based on sex and pop. Dutschke readily posed for the camera, including pictures on his bed recalling a famous series of Che Guevara which had appeared in *Playboy*. Dutschke’s picture came to adorn the front cover of *Capital*. The inside pages showed him with a popular prop of the time: the collected works of Marx and Engels, volume 23, Marx’s *Kapital*. *Capital* magazine made an additional lucrative offer: If Dutschke were to casually display a bottle of Pepsi-Cola when he spoke in public he would be paid 1000 DM a month. Dutschke refused.³

The second picture comes from 2005, when the French retail chain Leclerc mounted a high-profile campaign against the *Loi Galland*, a 1997 law which, in order to protect small business, introduced limits on dumping prices. The full-page newspaper advertisement shows five figures in silhouette against a dark-red background: on the right a man with an arm aggressively raised, the left hand clenched in a fist. In the middle of the picture, graffiti-style letters spell out one of the best-known slogans of ‘1968’, with an additional twist: ‘Il est interdit d’interdire/de vendre moins cher’. The small print demands that ‘la liberté totale’ be returned to the big retail chains. The company’s logo is supplemented: ‘E. Leclerc défend votre pouvoir d’achat’.⁴

It is not difficult to relate the two pictures to each other. The cola bottle offered to Dutschke in 1968 represents ‘the system’ already trying to offer ‘a deal’ to its toughest critics. The 2005 advertising campaign represents the most modern incarnation of consumer society, where a major retail chain nods to the libertarian thinking of ‘1968’ to convey its radical market demands. This long march can be broken down analytically, and this has to be done if the long-term effects of ‘1968’ are to be analysed adequately.

This essay does not portray ‘1968’ as a failed anticapitalist revolt: rather as a cultural revolution predominantly led by sections of the bourgeois élite which can be interpreted coherently

³ Bernd Rabehl, *Am Ende der Utopie. Die politische Geschichte der Freien Universität Berlin*, Berlin 1988, p. 255.

within the longer-term processes of transformation of post-industrial capitalism. The protagonists of '68' made a considerable contribution to the breaking down of conservative obstacles to consumption, the opening up of new markets and the creation of a new type of consumer. This will be expounded as the central thesis of this essay, which relies not so much on archival research, but on an innovative discussion of the literature. Ideas and approaches that already exist, albeit in scattered form, are honed for debate and positioned anew. The aim is to develop a conceptual approach which might be suitable to inform future research of a wider scope.

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Revising older, in the heat of the moment harsher, judgements of the uprising, Jürgen Habermas invokes a 'fundamental liberalisation' stemming from '1968'.⁵ Despite some conservative opposition,⁶ this edifying interpretation has become widespread in the meantime.⁷ In Germany, the spectrum of affirmative voices reaches from Wolfgang Kraushaar, the emphatic chronicler of the 'protest movement', via Richard von Weizsäcker and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation⁸ to the *BILD* tabloid newspaper, which dedicated a special edition, entitled 'The 68 Generation – Between Cola and Corega Tabs' to their erstwhile arch-enemies. With a mixture of mockery and recognition, the rebels are acknowledged as 'both bourgeois (in the best sense) and élite'.⁹ In more serious realms of analysis, a view of the '1968-ers' as grudging, even unwilling agents of westernisation, which significantly sped up West German society's move towards western lifestyles, has gained increasing acceptance.¹⁰ A structurally similar, sympathetic version of the revolt has emerged in France where 'May 1968' is often highlighted as a necessary moment in an inevitable process of cultural modernisation. This view goes back to Michel Crozier's interpretation of May 1968 as a society stalemated by an inflexible bureaucracy provoking the frustration of aspiring potential

⁴ *Le Monde*, 18.2.2005, p. 7.

⁵ Interview with Jürgen Habermas, *Frankfurter Rundschau* (11.3.1988); Habermas, *Protestbewegung und Hochschulreform*, Frankfurt 1969.

⁶ Hermann Lübke, *Endstation Terror, Rückblick auf lange Märsche*, Stuttgart 1978.

⁷ Axel Schildt, 'Vor der Revolte. Die 60er Jahre', *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 22/23 (2001), pp. 7–13.

⁸ Gerd Langguth, *Mythos 68. Ursachen und Folgen der Studentenbewegung – die Gewaltphilosophie Rudi Dutschkes*, Munich 2001, pp. 207–210.

⁹ *Die 68-er Generation: Zwischen Cola und Corega Tabs*, ed. BILD, Hamburg, 1998, quoted in Wolfgang Kraushaar, *1968 als Mythos, Chiffre und Zäsur*, Hamburg 2000, p. 48.

¹⁰ Anselm Doering-Manteuffel, *Wie westlich sind die Deutschen? Amerikanisierung und Westernisierung im 20. Jahrhundert*, Göttingen 1999.

élites.¹¹ Kristin Ross diagnoses a widespread emphasis on the sexual and cultural revolution and on 'free expression'. She critically calls this narrative 'the good natured and virtuous May'.¹²

On the other hand, an assertion that '1968' was an anticapitalist revolt is made by some authors, and this, at first glance, appears entirely plausible. Some of those involved in '1968' even think they can claim 'the first, youth-led, global revolution against capitalism'.¹³ A prototype of this interpretation seeing the events as a profound moment of crisis and potential revolution was Charles Posner's volume re-appropriating Edmund Burke's title.¹⁴ Some authors emphasise the protest movement's opposition to society's general development. Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey speaks of a 'programme that called into question the secular tendencies of the process of rationalisation in western societies and problematised the modern way of life'.¹⁵ In the course of the discussion begun by Ronald Inglehart on changing values, Wolfgang Kraushaar portrays the '1968-ers' as a different kind of élite ('Wertelite') standing for the communication of 'non-materialistic values'.¹⁶

There is also a tradition of work which has criticised the revolutionary rhetoric of the time and has pointed to outcomes and representations. Raymond Aron's *La Révolution introuvable* mounts a scathing liberal critique of the students' utopian demands and their 'psychodrama' masquerading as revolution. He lauds the material abundance created by the consumer society unsuccessfully challenged by would-be revolutionaries.¹⁷ Alain Touraine's participant account sees the social upheaval generated by post-industrial society at the backbone of the tumultuous events – only a harbinger of things to come – and thus highlights the birth of a social movement while adhering to the perspective of rebellion against 'techno-bureaucracy'.¹⁸ Three decades later Kristin Ross' approach, analysing subsequent representations of '1968', also needs the events of May 1968 as a counterweight. She acknowledges and

¹¹ Michel Crozier, *La Société bloquée*, Paris 1970.

¹² Kristin Ross, *May '68 and Its Afterlives*, Chicago 2002, p. 151; also see pp. 3–9.

¹³ Horst Mahler et al., 'Kanonische Erklärung zur Bewegung von 1968', in: Texte zur Zeit, http://www.deutsches-kolleg.org/oberlercher/texte-zur-zeit/1990-1999/kanonische_erklaerung.html (6.11.2005).

¹⁴ Charles Posner (ed.), *Reflections on the Revolution in France: 1968*, Harmondsworth 1970. Most recently: Gerd-Rainer Horn, *The Spirit of '68: Rebellion in Western Europe and North America, 1956–1976*, Oxford 2007.

¹⁵ Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey, 'Mai 68 in Frankreich', in: Gilcher-Holtey (ed.), *1968 – Vom Ereignis zum Gegenstand der Geschichtswissenschaft*, Göttingen 1998, p. 34.

¹⁶ Kraushaar, *1968 als Mythos*, p. 247, cf. Ronald Inglehart, *The Silent Revolution: changing values and political styles among Western publics*, Princeton 1977.

¹⁷ Raymond Aron, *La Révolution introuvable: réflexions sur les événements de mai*, Paris 1968..

¹⁸ Alain Touraine, *The May Movement: Revolt and Reform*. Transl. New York 1971, p. 58.

criticises a discourse emphasising the figure of the liberated, expressive individual as required by a global capitalist system. According to her, European societies accommodated American-style consumption habits within the framework of a longer postwar temporality, but she is not inclined to view the two phenomena in conjunction: ‘The event of May ’68 constitutes an interruption, not an acceleration, in the narrative of that process.’¹⁹ Interpretations of ‘1968’ have emerged according to fashions and political impulses. However, most approaches share a view of a profound historical rupture and a tendency to go back to the events or utterances of 1968.

In a much wider perspective, Boltanski and Chiapello provide some analysis concerning the ‘transfer of leftist skills to management’ in the case of the *soixante-huitards*:

Their professional value was now sustained by their very person, their experience in its most personal dimension [...]. They had become experts in the Foucauldian critique of power [...], they specialized in humanist exaltation of the extraordinary potential secreted in each person, if only they were given consideration and allowed to express themselves; in the supreme value of direct encounters, personal relations, particular exchanges; and in the proselytizing adoption of an attitude of openness, optimism and confidence [...].²⁰

Some interesting insights can now be gleaned from Detlef Siegfried’s voluminous *Habilitationsschrift* which outlines the interplay between minority and mass culture in the field of popular music and disproves the assumption that the increased variety of consumer lifestyles had a de-politicising effect.²¹ Siegfried’s work is part of a research approach which has begun to interpret ‘1968’ as part of the ‘cultural revolution’ of the ‘long decade of the 1960s’.²² Eric Hobsbawm expresses the same view of ‘1968’ as a cultural revolution among the youth of the upper classes ‘in the name of unlimited autonomy for individual longings’.²³ This points to deep behavioural changes in a profoundly stirred-up world indicating a relation between the release of personal wishes, the commercialisation of these wishes and the increasing acceptance of consumer society’s cultural and behavioural patterns. These involve a dramatic expansion of forms and symbolic functions of acts of consumption. From this perspective,

¹⁹ Ross, *May ’68*, p. 13.

²⁰ Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*. Transl. Gregory Elliott, London 2005, pp. 197–198. Also cf. Paolo Virno, *Opportunisme, cynisme et peur*, Combas 1991; Antoine Hennion, *La Passion musicale*, Paris 1995.

²¹ Detlef Siegfried, *Time is on My Side. Konsum und Politik in der westdeutschen Jugendkultur der 60er Jahre*, Göttingen 2006.

²² Axel Schildt et al. (eds), *Dynamische Zeiten*, Hamburg 2000; Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, c. 1958-c. 1974*, Oxford 1998.

²³ Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991*, London 2002, p. 334.

the revolt associated with the year 1968 was not anticapitalist, rather the unwilling avant-garde of the most modern manifestation of capitalist consumer society, which was about to gain full acceptance in the western world. The much-cited ‘failure’ of ‘1968’ as a revolution is in many respects identical with the far-reaching success of the ‘lifestyle revolt’.

In accordance with this perspective, the closely interwoven wings of the protest movement need to be differentiated. The ‘artistic critique’ of bohemians, communes, Situationists, Provos and hippies was in a productive, shifting relationship with the ‘social criticism’ of the politically more strictly focused ‘ascetic’ student leaders, factory workers and theorists.²⁴ Even the latter did not just want to read Marx but to live differently, but they remained a small minority, whereas the former embodied the innovation whose wide popularity came to be decisive: performative rule-breaking – in many ways the nub of the spirit of ‘1968’. This is not to say that the two wings were in sharp opposition to each other – rather, that for the purposes of this essay, one is more important than the other. As one of the doyens of the analysis of capitalism suggested: ‘What a religion has sought after as an ideal, and what the actual result of its influence on the lives of its adherents has been, must be sharply distinguished’.²⁵ With Weber, the ‘68-ers’ can thus be conceived as an ideal type: those who revolted against ossified ways of life by means of performative rule-breaking. This group carried out ostentatious lifestyle activities implicitly calculated to have an effect. This type is equally personified by the members of Kommune I and by advertisers such as Charles Wilp. It recasts them as a group hitherto imprecisely measured by social history, which can be labelled ‘performative hedonists’.²⁶

The dilemma afflicting many authors, how to define the ‘1968 movement’, cannot and need not be resolved here, but this wider definition of ‘the 68-ers’ helps to avoid a frequently invoked analytical problem: How can it be that some countries (like France and West Germany) had a ‘1968’ and others (like the UK or Switzerland) did not? It might just be a question of different mix ratios between social and artistic critique and their manifestations. The present approach is not intended to impose uniformity on the complex, transnational phenomenon of ‘1968’ – the movements were heterogeneous, allowing for diverse possibilities of

²⁴ On the relationship between social and artistic critique: Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello, *Le nouvel Esprit du Capitalisme*, Paris 1999.

²⁵ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, transl. Talcott Parsons, London 2006, pp. 137–138.

²⁶ The concept is an extension of the ‘modern autonomous hedonism’ in: Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism*, Oxford 1987, pp. 77–95.

organisation and eluding simple categorisation. There was not one, but many 1968s.²⁷ In the spirit of differentiation, this essay highlights a developmental thread that deserves further contextualisation. '1968' was a culmination and turning point between the peripheral, oppositional development of new lifestyles and forms of consumption since the end of the 1950s, and the pervasive commercialisation of these developments within majority culture. Unlike conservative and cynical interpretations, which want to shift the responsibility for everything reprehensible in liberal market society onto '1968', the interpretation suggested here preserves the intention and 'meaning' of the revolts.²⁸

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A significant diagnosis can be found in David Brooks' *Bobos in Paradise: The New Upper Class and How They Got There*. He analyses how *Microsoft* and *Gap* use quotes from Gandhi and Kerouac in their advertisements, and how the social and cultural attitudes of the 'new upper class' correspond less and less to the oppositional types of 'anti-establishment renegade' and 'pro-establishment company man':

The people who thrive (...) are the ones who can turn ideas and emotions into products. These are highly educated folk who have one foot in the bohemian world of creativity and another foot in the bourgeois realm of ambition and worldly success.²⁹

In contrast, but perhaps complementary, to Brooks' focus on aspiring elites, Michael Seidman finds a consumerist impulse in the working-class wing of the French 1968. Emphasising the non-revolutionary character of the revolt, he sees the desire to increase their participation in consumer affluence at the core of the striking workers' demands. Not radical reorganisation of operational power relations under the banner of *autogestion* or collective consciousness, but individualism and the wish for higher wages and longer holidays drove the largest strike movement in the history of France.³⁰

Gilles Lipovetsky's analyses the rise of individualism, a phenomenon which he views positively and partly traces back to 1968. In his book on fashion he provides a perhaps excessively apolitical view of the revolt:

May 1968 was subtended by a libertarian individualist, hedonist, and communicational ideology at the opposite pole from the self-abnegation of earlier revolutions.

²⁷ Ross, *May '68*.

²⁸ Cornelius Castoriadis, 'Les mouvements des années soixante', in: Edgar Morin et al., *Mai 68: La brèche suivi de vingt ans après*, Paris 1988, pp. 183–197.

²⁹ David Brooks, *Bobos in Paradise: The New Upper Class and How They Got There*, New York 2000, pp. 9–10.

³⁰ Michael Seidman, *The Imaginary Revolution: Parisian Students and Workers in 1968*, New York 2004.

[...] While they do not account for everything, radical chic and hypercritical conformity among young people are crucial to an understanding of the breadth and contagiousness of the spirit of May 1968 [...], a collective effort to draw society away from the rigid cultural norms of the past and give birth to a [...] more individualistic society that would conform to the requirements of consummate fashion.³¹

However, Lipovetsky's writings do not sustain a more detailed analysis of the exact role and mechanism of the (counter)-cultural innovations he is addressing. Jean Baudrillard saw the discourse of consumption and its critical undermining as two sides of the same coin: the critique helped to constitute the powerful myth. The final passage of *La Société de Consommation* (1970) contains one of the work's few references to 1968:

If all the denunciations, all the disquisitions on "alienation", and all the derisive force of pop and anti-art play so easily into establishment hands, that is because they are themselves part of the myth, which they round out by providing the counter-melody within the formal liturgy of the Object [...].³²

This basic pattern has gained a whole range of underpinnings. In their impressive study analysing the 'new spirit of capitalism', Boltanski and Chiapello portray criticism as not only indispensable for the 'improvement' of capitalism, but also for the alterations, adaptations and transformations necessary for its maintenance. Since the 1970s, the capitalist absorption of the libertarian-individualist criticism radiating from '1968' has helped to develop an ideology as well as social, cultural and business practices which made use of the 'new, liberated, and even libertarian way of making profit – which was also said to allow for realization of the self and its most personal aspirations [...].'³³ In a similar vein, the editors of a special issue of the journal *Thesis Eleven* have argued that the effects – if not the intentions – of the "'1968" critique had a shaping impact on the transformation of capitalism over the subsequent decades', holding out the possibility that 'the boundaries between a critique that in its self-understanding was anticapitalist and the new capitalism of our time get blurred.'³⁴

³¹ Gilles Lipovetsky, *The Empire of Fashion: Dressing Modern Democracy*. Transl. Princeton 1994, p. 208. Also see: *L'Ere du vide: essays sur l'individualisme contemporain*, Paris 1983; 'Changer la vie ou l'irruption de l'individualisme transpolitique', *Puvoirs* 39 (1986): pp. 91–100; *Le bonheur paradoxal: Essai sur la société d'hyperconsommation*, Paris 2006; Philippe Raynaud, 'Mai 68', in Frédéric Bluche and Stéphane Rials (eds), *Les Révolutions françaises*, Paris 1989, p. 450; Jean-Pierre LeGoff, *Mai 68. L'héritage impossible*, Paris 1998; Régis Debray, *Modeste contribution aux discours et cérémonies officielles du dixième anniversaire*, Paris 1978; Michel Clouscard, *Critique du libéralisme libertaire, généalogie de la contre-révolution*, Paris 2005; Clouscard, *Le capitalisme de la séduction – Critique de la social-démocratie*, Paris 1981; Jean-Claude Michéa, *Impasse Adam Smith. Brèves remarques sur l'impossibilité de dépasser le capitalisme sur sa gauche*, Castelnau 2002; Michéa, *Orwell, anarchiste Tory*, Castelnau 1995.

³² Jean Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*. Transl. C. Turner, London 1998, pp. 195–196.

³³ Boltanski and Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, pp. 167–215, here. p. 201.

³⁴ Paul Ginsborg, Luisa Passerini, Bo Stråth and Peter Wagner, '1968–2001: Measuring the Distance. Continuities and discontinuities in recent history', *Thesis Eleven* 68 (2002), p. 9.

Meanwhile, research into economic history has begun to think about ‘the “1968” of the managers’, a formula which refers to changes in leadership style, management, advertising and public relations, thereby pointing research on ‘1968’ into new directions off the beaten track.³⁵ In the late 1960s, some business circles thought critically about authority. It was not only student groups that invoked psychology and group dynamics. Such debates had altogether independent roots in the contemporary business literature which, at most, shared the plane of transatlantic inspiration with the student protests.³⁶

Within this perspective, developments would no longer have to be interpreted only as expressions of a failed revolt or social movement but rather as a phase in much bigger developments, which took place before and after the events of ‘1968’. The events of the protest movement are, however, not to be denied an active rôle. In search of an illustration for this, the metaphor of the catalyst lends itself to the purpose.³⁷ It is worthwhile to spell out the concept, which derives from chemistry: anti-authoritarian and anti-consumerist discourses reduced the energy needed to activate a process of social modernisation without being either reactants or products in this reaction. During a catalysed reaction, short-lived complex radicals are formed, which break down bonds which would hinder the reaction. This can be transferred to historical analysis: Ways of production and lifestyles, the provision of consumer goods and leisure facilities changed since the 1950s at a speed with which more inert mentalities and established patterns of behaviour could not keep pace. An increasing friction and a necessity for comprehensive social change arose from this imbalance. The performative rule-breaking of radical student protests helped to dismantle obstacles to consumption and try out new forms of consumption and communication, which became integrated into consumer society with great success.

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‘1968’ was a revolt in a time and place of unprecedented affluence. An incomparable boom period, the 1960s were a time of dynamic changes, in which setbacks could not shake reality and perception of economic upturn, success and stability: full employment had not yet been

³⁵ Christian Kleinschmidt, ‘Das ‘1968’ der Manager: Fremdwahrnehmung und Selbstreflexion einer sozialen Elite in den 1960er Jahren, in: Jan-Otmar Hesse et al (eds), *Kulturalismus, Neue Institutionenökonomik oder Theorienvielfalt. Eine Zwischenbilanz der Unternehmensgeschichte*, Essen 2002, pp. 19–29; Werner Plumpe, ‘1968 und die deutschen Unternehmen. Zur Markierung eines Forschungsfeldes’, *Zeitschrift für Unternehmensgeschichte* 49,1 (2004), pp. 45–66...

³⁶ Werner Kurzlechner, *Die Unternehmer und die Herausforderung der ‘1968er’ im Spiegel der öffentlichen Meinung*, MA dissertation, Frankfurt 2003, pp. 112–118.

forgotten, price stability and annual growth rates of about 6%, with a 69% increase in wages in a decade, made this a tangible reality.³⁸ The constantly accelerating and increasing opportunities for buying and consumption were directly experienced across boundaries of class and generation. In most Western countries and political camps there was an immense optimism during the ‘trente glorieuses’.³⁹ The 1968 generation were studying during the most fortunate years – in more ways than just economics – of an otherwise thoroughly unhappy century.

With the student protests at its core, ‘1968’ was in the first instance an intra-bourgeois confrontation pursued by an innovative minority. This is sometimes obscured by the attempts at alliances with workers⁴⁰ – which failed early in West Germany, later in Italy and France – and the rhetorical solidarity with the so-called ‘Third World’⁴¹. Pier Paolo Pasolini’s waspish analysis, that in 1968 the sons of the bourgeoisie – students – threw stones at the sons of the poor – the police – and derided them as bourgeois is not without a demonstrable socio-historical basis. With a student body of 5% of the population – today it is five times as high – the small minority attending university still belonged to a core of functional élites. This was also where most of them came from: working-class households constituted about 50% of the population in the 1960s but only about 5% of students, while academic households made up 1.5% of the population and 35% of students.⁴² A small, privileged élite, with strong bourgeois characteristics, enjoyed advantageous future prospects in an era when a university degree still guaranteed better life and career chances. The assertion that every other wearer of glasses became a professor during this period is a slander, but the immense broadening of career opportunities makes the current generation of students and young academics green with envy: The years between 1960 and 1968 saw a 63% increase in professorships, a 360% increase in lectureships and a 126% increase in assistant teaching posts in German universi-

³⁷ Edgar Morin, ‘Mais’, in Morin et al, *Mai 68: la brèche*, pp.145–167.

³⁸ Gerd Hardach, ‘Krise und Reform der Sozialen Marktwirtschaft. Grundzüge der wirtschaftlichen Entwicklungen in der Bundesrepublik der 50er und 60er Jahre’, in Schildt et al. (eds.), *Dynamische Zeiten*, pp. 197–217.

³⁹ Jean Fourastié, *Les trente glorieuses ou la révolution invisible de 1946 à 1975*, Paris 1979; Elisabeth Noelle et al (eds), *Jahrbuch der öffentlichen Meinung 1968–1973*, Allensbach 1974, p. 209.

⁴⁰ Tolomelli, *Repressiv getrennt*, pp. 231–284; Jan Kurz, *Die Universität auf der Piazza. Entstehung und Zerfall der Studentenbewegung in Italien 1966–1968*, Cologne 2001, pp. 300–323.

⁴¹ Bastian Hein, *Die Westdeutschen und die Dritte Welt, Entwicklungspolitik und Entwicklungsdienste zwischen Reform und Revolte 1959–1974*, Munich 2006, pp. 129–189.

⁴² Kai S. Cortina et al (eds), *Das Bildungswesen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Strukturen und Entwicklungen im Überblick*, Reinbek bei Hamburg 2003, here pp. 491–493, 591–607; Peter Lundgreen, *Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Schule im Überblick*. Teil II, Göttingen 1981, pp. 150–160.

ties.⁴³ In the same period, the number of university assistants increased eightfold in France⁴⁴ – not a march through but a rush into the institutions.

The momentous workers' protests – which formed an important dimension of '1968', more so in France and Italy than in Germany – are at least partly compatible with the argument of a consumerist thrust.⁴⁵ The more radical concerns pursued by some organisations tended to founder either in the money that the Grenelle Accords afforded or in the *société de spectacle*. Whilst an anti-capitalist illusion was in full bloom in the rhetorics of radical activists, consumerism served as social glue and was in many respects implied in the workers' demands. Arguably, the affluent 1960s with relatively low unemployment figures turned the workers' movement much less radical than some of its historical precursors. Workers and unions demanded shorter working hours for the sake of enjoying leisure. Within this demand, flexible arrangements allowing for overtime were again attuned to the dynamics of consumer society.⁴⁶

Ouvrir une brèche was a French slogan of 1968, still hopefully repeated decades later.⁴⁷ And without doubt, the tremors of '1968' did open breaches in the socio-economic structure – what is to be debated is how these opportunities were used. Irrespective of their intentions, the function and effect of the western 1968 revolts can be described as an integral part of capitalist adaptation processes. The following four hypotheses are intended to support and illustrate this interpretation. At the same time they indicate directions for future empirical studies:

I) *The protestors' performative hedonism proved highly compatible with consumer culture.* In *Milou en Mai*, a brilliant and bitter assessment of '1968', Louis Malle transposes the revolt to the upper-middle-class setting of a country house.⁴⁸ The family assemble for the burial of their grandmother, which is thwarted by the gravediggers going on strike. The son electrifies the others with the news of the revolt he brings back from Paris. The high point of the film is an

⁴³ Alfons Kenkmann, 'Von der bundesdeutschen 'Bildungsmisere' zur Bildungsreform in den 60er Jahren', in Schildt et al. (eds), *Dynamische Zeiten*, p. 416.

⁴⁴ Gilcher-Holtey, *Phantasie*, p. 112.

⁴⁵ This is not an attempt to deny or overshadow the '1968' of the workers or the existence of a radical political language as highlighted by Ross, *May '68*. However, Ross and others emphasise the revolutionary and anti-capitalist character of May '68 and the alliances between students and workers. Cf. Morin, 'Mais', in Morin et al, *Mai 68: la brèche*, pp.145–167.

⁴⁶ Seidman, *The Imaginary Revolution*, pp. 200–201, 231 and 255–256.

⁴⁷ Alain Schnapp and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Journal de la commune étudiante*, Paris 1969, pp. 618–642; Morin, 'Mais', in Morin et al, *Mai 68: la brèche*, p. 152.

⁴⁸ Louis Malle, *Milou en Mai* (France 1990).

opulent, sensuous open-air picnic, where, amid sun and wine, the protagonists fantasise about châteaux, vineyards, free love and a world freed from obligations. For a few moments, as a lorry driver and a maid make short appearances, bourgeois social order is turned upside down; however, it is restored a little later by hysterical fear of revolution, a downpour of rain and a slap in the face of the student son. The protagonists take up their accustomed places in society once more, but not without having added a few sensual elements to their repertoire of experience and consumption.

Few better things could have happened to an economy which had overcome the privations of the post-war years reaching a stage at which the fulfilment of needs became less important than the awakening of needs than a revolt campaigning for the free fulfilment of wishes. The slogan 'Live without dead time – have fun without chains' does not come from a Nescafé advertisement but from Raoul Vaneigem's *Traité de savoir-vivre à l'usage des jeunes générations*, a key Situationist text widespread in France and beyond.⁴⁹ The best-known slogans⁵⁰ – 'Under the paving-stones, the beach'; 'Let your wishes become reality'; 'it is forbidden to forbid'; 'we want it all, now' – bear witness not so much to a potentially ascetic refusal of consumerism, but to a prevailing mood that was hedonistic and Dionysian. This combined with what – at least in hindsight – seem like childlike delusions of omnipotence accompanied by widespread narcissistic transformations and a wave of strong emotionality.⁵¹

II) *From early on, protest culture sought out the publicity of consumer society as a spatial and moral sphere for its activities.* Prototypes for these activities can be found in the American civil rights movement: for example in the famous 1960 sit-in in a Woolworth's cafeteria in Greensboro, North Carolina, or the numerous demonstrations, riots and lootings in the course of inner-city unrest. Here, protest was explicitly focused on the equal integration of the black minority not only before the law but into consumer society.⁵² Transatlantic transfer brought about a change in forms of protest, which, in the European context, gained a veneer of genuine criticism of consumerism. Western Europe differed fundamentally from America in its lack of ethnicity as a central dimension of conflict. In the end, protest aimed at regimes of consumption boiled down to integration in both contexts.

⁴⁹ Raoul Vaneigem, *Traité du savoir-vivre à l'usage des jeunes générations*, Paris 1967.

⁵⁰ Cf. *Mai 68 à l'usage de moins de vingt ans*, Paris 1998.

⁵¹ Christopher Lash, *The Culture of Narcissism. American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*, New York 1979.

⁵² Cohen, *Consumers' Republic*, pp. 166–191, 363–387.

The ubiquitous emphasis on consumption according to the American model during the 1960s provoked opposition. The anti-American rhetoric of the protests contributed to the radical questioning of entrenched patterns of behaviour, but also concealed an appetite for a transatlantic transfer not only of protest culture but also of an aspiring alternative consumer culture.⁵³ The youthful rebels were thoroughly fascinated by American popular culture and adopted much more than simply the protest techniques of their rôle models and counterparts in Berkeley and New York. Also from a transatlantic perspective, the students, hippies and commune-dwellers formed a 'prophetic minority' which was 'part of a broader diffusion of lifestyles, fashions and world-views in the context of pop-culture'.⁵⁴ The most important intellectual influence against a 'repressive system' also shared a transatlantic dimension: Herbert Marcuse's critique of consumer society sought to unmask 'one-dimensional' affluent societies as inhuman. Through his eloquent opposition to this form of 'manipulation', the idea of 'emancipating' the individual from the practical necessities of consumer society gained credibility.⁵⁵

In West Germany, the Situationist group 'Subversive Aktion' played a central rôle in this. In December 1966, the Kurfürstendamm in Berlin was the scene of 'go-ins' in department stores and walking demonstrations, whose participants disguised themselves by carrying gift-wrapped packages of leaflets.⁵⁶ The occupiers of the Censier annexe to the Sorbonne established a similar Marcusean focus on consumerism by distributing flyers and pamphlets in stores and cafés and by agitating the employees at the major department stores Bazar de l'Hôtel de Ville and Belle Jardinière advocating the 'occupation of empty apartments [and] distribution of supermarket goods to strikers'.⁵⁷

In the West German commune movement, a combination of lifestyle laboratory, show and commerce was present from the beginning. In a letter to Andreas Baader in May 1968, Ulrich Enzensberger wrote, 'We thought up a new sales sensation: group sex, to bring in more

⁵³ Wolfgang Kraushaar, 'Die transatlantische Protestkultur', in: Kraushaar, *1968 als Mythos*, pp. 53–80.

⁵⁴ Claus Leggewie, '1968 – Ein transnationales Ereignis und seine Folgen', in: Detlef Junker et al (eds), *Die USA und Deutschland im Zeitalter des Kalten Krieges*, vol. 2, Stuttgart 2001, pp. 632–643; Jack Newfield, *A Prophetic Minority: the American New Left*, London 1967.

⁵⁵ Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the ideologies of advanced industrial societies*, New York 1966.

⁵⁶ Wolfgang Ruppert, 'Um 1968 – Die Repräsentation der Dinge', in Ruppert (ed.), *Um 1968 – Die Repräsentation der Dinge*, Marburg 1998, p. 21f; Ulrich Chaussy, *Die drei Leben des Rudi Dutschke. Eine Biographie*, Berlin 1993, pp.152–154.

⁵⁷ Seidman, *The Imaginary Revolution*, p. 124; Jacques Baynac, *Mai retrouvé*, Paris 1978, pp. 196 and 257.

money (...)'.⁵⁸ Baader, who was in custody for questioning about setting fire to two Frankfurt department stores, answered that Kommune I was still only appearing in the cultural pages in the newspapers: 'You must make the leap into advertising, Fanta etc. What kind of money would that bring in? (...)'.⁵⁹ In the pictures which they disseminated to the outside world, Kommune I played on the full range of bourgeois fantasies about order and sex.⁶⁰ The members of the commune held regular meetings for media work, in which newspaper cuttings and the reactions of 'the system' to their own actions were considered. The presence of the media served to increase the revolutionaries' sense of themselves, but also became cultivated as a source of income: on the house landing hung a notice with the words 'cough up first, then we talk'. Their correspondence shows that the predominantly male commune members were the recipients of veritable fan mail from enthusiastic imitators all over West Germany. It also shows that they carried on a flourishing mail-order trade in their own writings as well as Mao-bibles, revolutionary stickers and badges.⁶¹ Irony and reality formed an explosive mixture.

The compatibility of '1968' with consumerism is plainly made clear by Gabriel and Daniel Cohn-Bendit's pamphlet *Linksradikalismus*: 'We are not acting for our children – because sacrifice, the product of a Stalinist-Judeo-Christian humanism, is counter-revolutionary – but so that *we* will eventually be able to enjoy ourselves without limits'.⁶² The mixture of irony, criticism of consumption and semi-voluntary fusion with the logic and language of consumer culture is also a theme of Daniel Cohn-Bendit's 1975 memoir, revealingly entitled *Le grand bazar*. The content delivers what the introduction offers: 'This book claims to be no more than a colourful department store of the radical left. (...) Please help yourselves.'⁶³ In 1968, Cohn-Bendit had already progressed much further in his self-transformation into a brand than Dutschke, who had refused the cola-bottle offer mentioned above.

In a reference to a sit-in at the Freie Universität Berlin in April 1967, the writer Peter Schneider outlined the strategy of performative rule-breaking:

⁵⁸ Ulrich Enzensberger to Andreas Baader, 10.5.1968, Correspondence of Kommune I (130,01), Archive of the *Institut für Sozialforschung*, Hamburg.

⁵⁹ Baader to Kommune I, 10.6.1968, *ibid.*

⁶⁰ Ulrich Enzensberger, *Die Jahre der Kommune I. Berlin 1967–1969*, Cologne 2004; Koenen, *Das rote Jahrzehnt*, pp. 149–182.

⁶¹ Mainzer Studentenzeitung to Kommune I, 24.10.1967, Correspondence of Kommune I (130,01), Archive of the *Institut für Sozialforschung*, Hamburg.

⁶² Gabriel and Daniel Cohn-Bendit, *Linksradikalismus*, Reinbek 1968, p. 134.

⁶³ Daniel Cohn-Bendit, *Der grosse Bazar. Gespräche mit Michel Lévy, Jean-Marie Salmon, Maren Sell*, Munich 1975, p. 5.

We have informed about the war in Vietnam with all matter-of-factness, although we experienced that we could cite the most unthinkable details of American policy in Vietnam without getting our neighbours' imaginations going. But then we found that we only had to step on the lawn where it said 'Keep off' to cause sincere, general and lasting horror.⁶⁴

If this pattern of argument is detached from its political context, then a technique – in itself neutral – becomes clear: the performative gaining of attention while simultaneously eroding traditional patterns of behaviour and consequently creating innovative cultural and social distinctions. This kind of insights into the 'economy of attention',⁶⁵ achieved around 1968 and the practical techniques that had been learned along with them, were seized upon and developed further elsewhere, for instance in advertising and the consumer industry.

There are numerous examples of the 'fun guerrilla's' (Späßguerilla) particular relationship to advertising and commerce in Kommune I leaflets. Attitudes which would prove especially marketable in decades to come – pointed cynicism and biting irony – characterise the convergence of advertising slogans and criticism of the Vietnam War:

The day is ending, time for Jonny (sic) Walker.
An American soldier killed in Vietnam costs the USA 12 million DM.
A dead Vietcong costs 1.6 million.
Because being particular in one's tastes always costs a bit more.⁶⁶

The 'Burn warehouse burn' leaflet (number 8) marked the beginning of a serious radicalisation, as incitement became reality, in the arson attacks by Baader, Ensslin, Proll and Söhnlein on two Frankfurt department stores in April 1968, as well as the lesser-known attack on the KaDeWe department store in Berlin by Bruhn and Kunzelmann in December 1969. It could be argued that the radical minority which turned to violence definitely left behind the nexus between the '1968' movement and consumer society which has been discussed. The development of terrorism in the 1970s should not be seen as a direct and causal consequence of the protest movement. However, the connection between 'anti-systemic' violence, critique of consumption and media influence does seem to be central to the early phase of terrorism of department-store arsonists, hash rebels and 'Tupamaros'. One can quite reasonably interpret the prototerrorist acts of the late 1960s as violent attempts at breaking up an alleged circle: that of capitalist adaptation of opposition and criticism originating in a movement which the

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⁶⁵ Georg Franck, *Ökonomie der Aufmerksamkeit. Ein Entwurf*, Munich 1998.

⁶⁶ Leaflet by Kommune I, in Correspondence of Kommune I, 130,01, Archive of the *Institut für Sozialforschung*, Hamburg.

radicals saw as a failure. This radicalisation is also characterised by the performative momentum of gaining attention in the media with ‘innovative’ methods not dissimilar to advertising strategies.

III) *The response of the ‘system’ to the protests was surprisingly flexible, and resulted in the further development of capitalism and consumer society.* Concerning the reactions, images-turned-icons – the dying Benno Ohnesorg, the CRS in Paris, water cannons on peaceful protestors, the debates about the emergency laws – obstruct the view of essential currents. The largely unresearched flexibility with which the ‘system’ reacted to a revolt which offered more opportunities for future development than threats seems significant.

The speed with which the immense potential for imagination, linguistic wit and communicative intelligence which took off in 1968 was welcomed and integrated in advertising is perhaps relatively unsurprising. The field of advertising and PR is indeed the only place where the ‘1968’ slogan ‘power to the imagination’ really caught on – in its own way. However, this is not to say that the majority of the 68-ers ended up in advertising. It is well known that the spectrum of biographical paths was very broad both socially and politically. The milieu of the so-called K-groups for example, combined intellectual fervour with material frugality and ascetic rigour. *Operaismo*⁶⁷ and factory groups did lead a few groupings towards the universally-praised working class and factories.⁶⁸ This current, which remained a minority even within the left, led mainly to not entirely successful experiments and personal experiences, but hardly to socially effective models. The hedonistically-inclined majority, who rejected this lifestyle, established their own verbal monument with the scornful slogan ‘Sei schlau, bleib beim Überbau’ (Be clever, stay with the superstructure).

Analyses of sociological networks can elucidate the relationships between social movements and élites.⁶⁹ So far, such an analysis of the protest movements of the late 1960s has not been undertaken. A combination of synchronic and diachronic analysis of the personal connections between protest activists and élites in the ‘creative industries’ would probably bring out revealing results. In a brief passage, Brooks indicates that, ‘(...) the cultural radicalism of the

⁶⁷ Antonio Negri, *Proletari e Stato*, Milan 1976; Raniero Panzieri, *La crisi del movimento operaio*, Milan 1973.

⁶⁸ Andreas Kühn, *Stalins Enkel, Maos Söhne. Die Lebenswelt der K-Gruppen in der Bundesrepublik der 70er Jahre*, Frankfurt 2005. Koenen, *Jahrzehnt*, pp. 257–316.

⁶⁹ Mario Diani and Doug McAdam (eds.), *Social Movements and Networks: Relational Approaches to Collective Action*, Oxford 2003.

sixties was a (...) cultural effort by the rising members of the privileged classes to (...) replace the old order with a new social code that would celebrate spiritual and intellectual ideals.’ The credo of this new élite (...) was ‘Thou shalt construct thine own identity.’⁷⁰ While the middle-class background of the student protesters does not automatically imply a non-revolutionary agenda, it is no great leap to the supposition that a considerable number of the activists might simply have been too bound up with career networks of new functional élites to hold on to a ‘revolutionising of the system’ in the long term. As long as precise socio-historical studies do not exist, the nexus between ‘1968’ and the most modern branches of consumerism cannot be proved. Hence for now it is primarily a question of investigating their reciprocal nature. In Germany, the organisers of the SDS anti-Springer campaign came across this when they got hold of a marketing analysis which the tabloid publisher had commissioned:

The militant critics of the Springer company established with consternation that ‘analytical methods and findings are no longer distinguishable from ours – or only in terms of moral tendency (...). Even before we have properly expressed them, our reflections and findings are already no longer our own.’⁷¹

In their rhetoric, they still clung to the idea of commercial adaptation, while in terms of content the reciprocal model should have been obvious.

Thus a key text like Guy Debord’s *La société du spectacle* could be read as a lucid critique of society,⁷² but what had been learnt here could also be used for careers in the media and advertising: young, innovative, creative, breaking moulds and looking for new paths – exactly the right profile. As yet it is a matter of informed speculation that advertising and the media are among the professions into which the major personal and ideological impulses of the 68-ers were channelled.⁷³ The publicity artist Vilim Vasata, reflecting on the question what effect slogans like ‘consumption terror’, ‘refusal’, ‘expansion of consciousness’ or ‘sexual freedom’ had on his work, answered laconically: ‘We grew. We became a business’. What the even more popular Charles Wilp put on the record may overestimate his own position, but it

⁷⁰ Brooks, *Bobos in Paradise*, pp. 32–34.

⁷¹ ‘Die Psychoanalyse der Bild-Zeitung’, quoted in: Hans Magnus Enzensberger, ‘Der Triumph der Bild-Zeitung oder Die Katastrophe der Pressefreiheit’, in: Enzensberger, *Mittelmaß und Wahn. Gesammelte Zerstreuungen*, Frankfurt 1989, p. 80.

⁷² Guy Debord, *La société du spectacle*, Paris 1967.

⁷³ Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool*, is one of the few empirical approaches to this phenomenon. Cf. Doris Köpf’s slender article on the basis of a survey of 120 former APO activists’ career paths; in brief, 20% became lecturers, 35% went into the field of media and culture, 15% politics. Doris Köpf, ‘Was aus den 68ern geworden ist’, *Focus*, 2.9.1996, pp. 66–78; Kraushaar, *1968 als Mythos*, pp. 239–243.

is still telling: ‘Going around with the commune members – Obermaier, Dutschke, Langhans or Meinhof – we were a very close-knit clique’.⁷⁴ At least, as far as skills are concerned, it was not a big step from the mastery of communications, which many of the ‘1968-ers’ developed in their dealings with the public, to the techniques of the *captains of consciousness*.⁷⁵ On the other hand, the advertising profession, which sees itself as composed of ‘creatives’, whose trade is in the commodification of major historical currents, could neither ignore the lifestyle revolution, nor the potential ‘human resources’ represented by the ‘1968-ers’.⁷⁶ The attempts at breaking down the taboos around physicality, and the obsessive concern with sex, which are justifiably associated with ‘1968’,⁷⁷ are one example among many.

A phenomenon of economic and cultural significance can essentially be traced back to the late 1960s.⁷⁸ In order for ‘identity marketing’ to triumph, new specialists had to be created, who could pick up trends from the street and put them into successful forms for the market. Like ‘coolness hunters’ filming with secret cameras in gay bars, the masses of market and symbol strategists are not a fantasy in the minds of culture-critical disciples of Adorno but an industry with turnovers in the billions. The insights into the functioning of *cultural hegemony* (Gramsci) sharpened in the narcissistic sociotope of the ‘1968-ers’ at least potentially predestined them for leadership in a field whose ambition no longer restricted it to ‘creeping into the brain of the masses’.⁷⁹ It increasingly went beyond this, catalysing new, hitherto unknown lifestyles and supplying them with desires and commodities.

Even at the highest levels of German business, lively discussions were taking place as to how all this ‘imagination’ that had been stirred up could be integrated into business management. In one of the most original German studies on the interactions of counter-culture and ‘establishment’ – an unpublished master’s thesis – Werner Kurzlechner shows how German entrepreneurs and their associations debated a change of leadership style in the late 1960s.⁸⁰ *Creative management*, group dynamics, tolerance and motivation became key concepts. The general director of Knorr Foods recommended ‘imagination’ as well as ‘permanent renewal’

⁷⁴ Interviews with Vasata and Wilp, in: Schepers (ed.), *1968 – Design und Alltagskultur*, pp. 156, 160.

⁷⁵ Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness*, New York 1976; Raymond Williams, *Advertising: The Magic System. Problems in Materialism and Culture*, London 1980.

⁷⁶ Cf. Joachim Kellner et al (eds.), *1945 bis 1995, 50 Jahre Werbung in Deutschland*, Ingelheim 1995, pp. 119–123.

⁷⁷ Dagmar Herzog, *Sex after Fascism. Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany*, Princeton 2005, pp. 141–183.

⁷⁸ Naomi Klein, ‘Patriarchy Gets Funky: The Triumph of Identity Marketing’, in Klein, *No logo*, London 2000, pp. 107–124.

⁷⁹ Rainer Gries et al., *‘Ins Gehirn der Masse kriechen’: Werbung und Mentalitätsgeschichte*, Darmstadt 1995.

by integrating ‘our time’s lightning speed of change in modern leadership strategy’.⁸¹ In 1968, the *Handelsblatt* wrote that only a flexible management style would be able to turn business and society into systems capable of absorbing the visible potential of the protest. This was similar to the analysis of the chief thinkers of the new left, but here it was intended as a business strategy. In the perception and analysis of ‘1968’, capitalism is often portrayed as exclusively authoritarian, reactionary and repressive, which does not fit at that degree of generalisation.

IV) *The performative rule breaking which was pioneered in the late 1960s became the prototype for countless commercial variations.* In June 1968, no less an advertiser than David Ogilvy – founder of one of the world’s largest agencies⁸² – recognised the student protests’ relevance to marketing: ‘Why shouldn’t one give an advertising task to ‘Red Dany’ (Cohn-Bendit) or to Dutschke (...) Yes, he would be the right man for the Mercedes commercial. He knows how to sell things to young people.’⁸³ The relationship between protest and advertising embraces not only the structural analogy of performative limited rule-breaking, but also the common rejection and outgrowing of restrictive ties.

In 1968, ‘Run, comrade, yesterday’s world is behind you!’ was written on walls in Paris. The attack on ‘stuffiness’ was an attack on existing ties, conventions and regulations. This is exactly what was needed for the great transformation in terms of spreading commodification further and more freely. Conservative traditionalism lay in the path of capitalism’s progress wherever it obstructed the onward march of the market and consumption. ‘Stuffiness’ meant weekends with family and church which hindered consumption; barriers against the ‘publication’ of sexuality and the sexualisation of the worlds of culture and commerce; authoritarian control over young people, whose ‘free development’ created many repercussions, but not least a gigantic parallel market; patriarchal conventions which kept women out of the employment market and only let them participate in sections of the consumer market; local loyalties and roots, which knew nothing of global markets in consumer goods and tourism; briefly, traditional bonds and rigid rules of familial and professional communication, which

⁸⁰ Kurzlechner, *Die Unternehmer*.

⁸¹ Heinrich Oswald, *Führen statt Verwalten*. Bern 1968. Quoted in: Kurzlechner, *Die Unternehmer*, p. 119.

⁸² Cf. David Ogilvy, *Confessions of an Advertising Man*, London 1964.

⁸³ Ogilvy, ‘Große Politiker brauchen keine Werbung’, *Handelsblatt*, 24.6.1968, p. 3, quoted in: Kurzlechner, *Die Unternehmer*, p. 149.

had to be exploded in order to create flexible consumers. There was hardly an impulse originating in '1968' that could not be integrated into the logic of the great transformation. There is no clear separation between the events and innovations of 1968 and the economic, cultural and political appropriation of these impulses in the following decades by new elites. Both levels were intertwined from the beginning.

Even the few cases where actual shortages or voluntary restraint from consumption had caused a certain culture of frugality were open for transformation: a bookshelf made out of orange boxes became the *Malmö* sideboard, a door taken off its hinges and put onto a few bricks, the *Ingo* coffee table, and Ingvar Kamprad, the founder of IKEA, one of the richest men in the world. The struggle against repressive rules supposedly suppressing sexuality returned in the form of the ubiquitous sexualisation of public communications, gushing out of every radio, television and internet channel. The 'liberation' which had been staged rather than actually achieved in the self-publication of Kommune I, manifested itself first in the surplus value that could be gained from the beauty of Uschi Obermaier, and somewhat later re-appeared with *Big Brother* and its derivatives.⁸⁴ The type of the ever youthful hedonist and the differentiation of lifestyles were not invented by the 68ers, but they were significantly inspired and catalysed by them and were quickly snapped up by the market. Early in 1967, the Kaufhof company had already opened 24 'Carnaby-style Beat Shops'. The Handelsblatt emphasised the 'tendency towards individualism' and enthused: 'Beat is here, Carnaby has won, and shocking colours are not shocking any more.' In a 'special offer for the young generation' in autumn 1968, the Hamburg Otto mail-order company offered all sorts of 'groovy gear': about 3000 products, including a hippie flower-patterned folding bicycle.⁸⁵ Thirty years later, usurpations of this kind inspired *The Who* guitarist Pete Townshend to remark that the only rebellious thing a person could do after the complete commercial transformation of every previously revolutionary gesture was to marry and start a family.⁸⁶

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However, there was no shortage of clear-sighted and critical observation amongst the contemporary thinkers of the late 1960s. At Nanterre in June 1968, a commission called *Culture*

⁸⁴ Interview with Rainer Langhans: 'Das ist eine utopische Situation', *Die Welt*, 6.11.2000 (<http://www.welt.de/daten/2000/11/06/1106mm200663.htm>).

⁸⁵ 'Mit Schock, Beat und Carnaby', *Handelsblatt*, 13.3.1967, p. 9; 'Post-Shop bietet Beat und Pop', *Handelsblatt*, 15.9.1968, quoted in Kurzlechner, *Die Unternehmer*, p. 136.

⁸⁶ Interview with Pete Townshend, *Der Spiegel*, 29 (1993).

et Contestation pledged to combat the consumerist subculture dispensed by the bourgeois media and to liberate authentic working-class discourse.⁸⁷ In 1969, the writer Peter Paul Zahl unfolded a vision, whose insightfulness, despite the exaggeration, cannot be denied:

I see busfuls of West German and American tourists coming to Berlin, and after the compulsory visits to the Wall, the Gedächtniskirche and the Ku-damm, they seek out the legalised hash clubs: Langhans and Kunzelmann and hundreds of others, posing picturesquely, graciously let themselves be photographed, and don't make a bad living out of it.⁸⁸

Eleven issues later, the militant paper *Agit 883*, in which Zahl had published this, made a clearer analysis:

Mass consumption has adapted itself well to psychedelic music and hippie clothing, and the best customers are the ones with money. The most mobile part of the old system is the capitalists themselves: they know where the sources of profit are. The hippies are contributing to the beautification of capitalism, not its abolition.⁸⁹

A revolt dominated by the young, concentrating heavily on lifestyles, whose rapid pace met traditions and surviving conservative cultural elements head-on, overlapped with much stronger market forces. This led to a 'nuclear fusion of counter-culture and the culture industry'.⁹⁰ The mechanism of the long-term reaction is important: There were ossified conventions such as the consumption patterns of the 'economic miracle' mentality, banking on Cold War competition, relatively rigid hierarchies, domesticity and durable goods. These were transformed in a complex process, in favour of a variant of capitalism that proved more flexible and also more successful in the rivalry between the two political systems. Consumer society in its various forms was a precondition as well as a consequence of the '1968' movement, which neither produced it nor, in the medium or long term, prevented it, but rather catalysed it. It is a question of the reciprocity of the factors discussed in this essay: the 'social critics' outside the parliamentary system would never have attained the prominence and effect they did without the media frenzy about the countless lifestyle rebels in the whole western world. On the other hand, the counter-culture benefited from politicisation, because it consequently got more attention. The media and advertisers welded the two together. In the long term, however, social criticism was relegated to the background in the face of the counter-culture, which was gaining more and more momentum as it became commercialised and

⁸⁷ Seidman, *The Imaginary Revolution*, p. 127.

⁸⁸ Peter P. Zahl, 'Haschischkampagne oder Die Ideologie der glücklichen Verbraucher', *Agit 883* 24 (24.7.1969).

⁸⁹ Untitled, anonymous, *Agit 883* 35 (9.10.1969).

⁹⁰ Walter Grasskamp, *Der lange Marsch durch die Illusionen. Über Kunst und Politik*, Munich 1995, pp. 11–54.

popularised. Additionally, during the 1970s and 1980s, social criticism became increasingly associated in the public consciousness with excessive theorisation, political violence and failed Marxism, and became discredited as a result.

The 'breach' which was indeed opened up in 1968 led on the one hand to a range of emancipatory impulses, and today these are justifiedly upheld. At the same time, however, in an unintended but – to put it carefully – no less important thread, the breach led to the acceleration of exactly those mighty transformations referred to in the 1848-text quoted at the beginning.